

Visalia student serves as House page

**By Peter Vlazakis
Visalia**

I had the unique opportunity this summer to serve as a page in the House of Representatives. It was a life-changing event.

The U.S. House of Representatives Page Program is one of the longest programs in the U.S. Congress. Pages are hired as employees of the House of Representatives and live, eat and work on Capitol Hill.

While working, pages get an unparalleled view of the way government works – a view that is rarely seen outside of the Capitol walls. Pages are high school juniors or seniors who have been sponsored by a member of Congress and have been selected by the Office of the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Pages come from diverse backgrounds and represent all 50 states. Their primary function is to deliver correspondence and timely messages among Congress members and between administrative staff and members within the congressional office buildings. Their work is invaluable, and they are highly visible in the congressional complex. The long history of the page program has made it an integral part of daily life on Capitol Hill.

My particular assignment was the Republican cloakroom. The cloakroom is adjacent to the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives and serves as both a lounge for Congress members and a place for them to make and receive phone calls. Of the approximately 66 pages, six of us were given this assign-

ment for the entire summer, and I quickly learned why. Our main job was to answer the phones and deliver messages to members while they were on the floor. However, in order to deliver messages, we first had to memorize the names and faces of all 229 Republican representatives. Even then, to find one particular Congress member in a room full of them was extremely difficult, because they never stop moving.

The cloakroom is also the unofficial information center in the Capitol, and most of our time was spent answering Congress members' and staff's questions about the schedule for the day and about the legislation that was to be discussed. Normally my workday started at 9 a.m. and ended around 8 p.m. Because of my particular assignment in the cloakroom, this actually depended on the time the House went out of session.

I recall at least two occasions that we were on the floor until well past midnight.

In addition to watching legislation being debated and voted on each day, I also had the chance to witness two historic events this summer – the state funeral of former President Ronald Reagan and the address of President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan to a joint session of Congress.

The pages were given the opportunity to have a private viewing of President Reagan's casket as it lay in state in the Capitol Rotunda, and the six cloakroom pages were able to watch the dress rehearsal of the funeral from the balcony of the Speaker



Rep. Devin Nunes stands on the Capitol steps with Peter Vlazakis, who served as a page in the House of Representative during the summer.

of the House's office in the front of the Capitol. Also, the pages were able to sign the book that was presented to the Reagan family by the U.S. Congress.

Secondly, to be in the House chamber during a joint session of Congress for a speech by such a symbolically important figure in the world today was a remarkable opportunity.

I would like to thank Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Visalia, for sponsoring me, as well as members of my community who have always encouraged me in my endeavors.

My summer in Washington has left me with a lifetime of experiences and has broadened my outlook of our democratic system. Being a page gives you the opportunity to witness democracy in its truest sense.